



Granite School District Civic and Character Education

Granite School District views civic and character education as an integrated part of the school curriculum, and as a process that involves not just the school, but the various communities that our students and employees are involved in. The goal of civic and character education is to get students involved in these communities, while teaching them positive social skills. These skills are enhanced through hands-on activities that encourage desired student behaviors and real-world settings whenever possible.

Because Granite School District is one of the most diverse districts in the state, all of our teachers participate in the REACH (Respecting Ethnic and Cultural Heritage) training. This extensive training has the goals of increasing personal cultural awareness, understanding and recognizing prejudice, racial discrimination and stereotyping, and building a positive understanding of cultural diversity. Teachers are coached on how to infuse multicultural education concepts into lesson plans, instead of having them as standalone units.

Along with the REACH training, schools are encouraged to participate in other programs that reinforce civic involvement and cooperation across groups. Every elementary school is involved in the "Learning for Life" program, which has paraprofessionals teaching children about key elements of character education. This includes lessons about self-esteem and personal safety, and also interpersonal skills like tolerance and anti-bullying. These lessons continue at the secondary level, taught by school counselors, with small group support and one-on-one interventions when requested.

Much of the civic education comes through the curriculum taught in the social studies classes. Whether it's U.S. History or World Geography, Utah Studies or Government, there will be connections made to the student's local communities, their worldview, and how they can be involved in some way. These elements are present in the Social Studies Core, and the teachers implement them with their students. At the secondary level there are also many extracurricular programs that are supported by the school district. Some of these are through government sponsorship, like the "Do the Write Thing" essay competition from the Utah Board of Juvenile Justice, Mock Trial competitions, and the Senate Youth program. We also support teachers who participate in the We the People competition about constitutional history and law. Other programs are through non-profit organizations, like the Sacred

Images tour from the Center for Documentary Expressions and Art. This innovative program incorporated storytelling, art, history, and cultural connections to help students explore their own relationship to their culture—a major component of character education.

In Granite School District, we make an effort to make the Civic and Character Education as “real world” as possible, and that includes incorporating all of the technology that the 21st Century has to offer. Some examples: the Face to Faith initiative from the Tony Blair Faith Foundation is a relatively new one, but a structured program that has students exploring the interface between their beliefs and their communities. It started in 2011-2012 with one school in our district, and has expanded to eight schools this year. The highlight of the Face to Faith program has our students videoconferencing with students in countries in other countries, including Jordan, Mexico, the Philippines, and Indonesia. We’ve had students win awards for their blog entries based on their community experience. Granite School District is also starting to participate in the Future City Competition, which has students using engineering, civic, and technology skills to solve common community problems. It’s a new program, but one that promises to be exciting.

Because funding towards social studies is so limited, there are concerns about ongoing professional development in the field of Civics and Character Education; Granite School District has made good use of a Teaching American History Grant that expires this school year, using it to finance nearly a decade of American History Academies. This has trained hundreds of our teachers (especially our elementary teachers), teaching them how to better teach history and government alongside language arts. With that funding gone, there’s a major gap between what our teachers could be teaching and what they’re actually equipped to teach. Organizations like the Utah Council for the Social Studies (a non-profit organization of social studies teachers) offers semi-annual conferences to aid in that professional development, but they’ve also lost funding from the Teaching American History Grants. Without an influx of funding, materials, or other support, the prospects of both civics and character education are darker than they’ve been in some time.

We have dedicated teachers and excellent students, with parental support in our communities. We hope to continue that support of our children as the “future guardians of the liberties of our country” well into the future.

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